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THINGS YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BEFORE YOU STARTED HOMESCHOOLING





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Before you browse these pages, take a minute and put your old shoes back on. (Figuratively, that is.) Read this resource guide as if you were just considering homeschooling for the first time. You might gain some useful tips and fresh perspective!

1. You CAN teach your children

Picture yourself settling down at your computer when you first considered home education. You take a deep breath and google “homeschooling.” You have perfect clarity as you research ... complete confidence you can find what you need and be a great teacher, right?

Not if you’re like most parents! Most homeschoolers have plenty of questions and doubts along the way. They’re just normal people doing what they believe is best for their unique children.

They’ve discovered the beauty of homeschooling. They see nagging problems with other educational models. And they’ve decided that home education is a great option for their family.

Did You Know?

- Home education (i.e., homeschooling) is a **time-honored approach to education** wherein parents take charge of their children’s learning and teach them outside the typical school structure.
- **Homeschooling is legal** in all 50 states and many countries.
- **Millions of American children learn at home.** The number of homeschooling families in the U.S. has been growing for decades.
- **Homeschoolers consistently outperform peers** on standardized tests, regardless of the homeschooling parents’ level of education.
- **Homeschool graduates now thrive** in colleges, jobs and families all over the country.

What does this mean for you?

You can homeschool too! The main qualification is that you love your children and value their education. After all, you’ve already taught your children naturally since birth. Visit www.sonlight.com/you-CAN-homeschool.html for serious encouragement from three homeschool moms.

2. Homeschooling is NOT for everyone

Each family should weigh the pros and cons.

Some Benefits of Home Education

You get to...

- Be the central influence in your children's lives.
- Tailor your children's education according to their specific gifts, needs and learning styles.
- Build intimate and meaningful relationships with your children.
- Decide what your children learn and when they learn it.
- Share your values and beliefs with your children and guide them as difficult questions surface.
- Save a lot of money compared to private school tuition.
- Protect your children from certain negative influences they may encounter at school.
- Experience a lifestyle of freedom outside the constraints of traditional school days and school years.

Some Potential Disadvantages of Home Education

You may have to...

- Justify homeschooling to family and friends who are concerned about your decision to learn at home.
- Spend more time with your children than you're accustomed to.
- Readjust your lifestyle and attitude as you live on a single income and go against the flow of modern culture.
- Spend money to buy quality curriculum (but it's far cheaper than private school!).
- Encourage your children even when you don't feel like it.
- Deal with the frustrations of sometimes feeling "behind."
- Get out of your comfort zone as you learn how to homeschool effectively.

3. You don't have to do it alone

An internet search can lead you to thousands of homeschool resources. Here are some of the very best:

Books

- *The Three R's* by Ruth Beechick (for grades K-3): Teach reading, writing and arithmetic in a way your children will understand and love.
- *The Way They Learn* by Cynthia Tobias: Discover your children's learning styles and find the teaching approaches that are right for your unique family.
- *For the Children's Sake: Foundations of Education for Home and School* by Susan Schaeffer Macaulay: A short introduction to home education philosophy and practice. Give your children an education that is warm, intelligent and full of life.

Local Homeschoolers

- Local Homeschool Support Groups: Help awaits you at these gatherings of local homeschoolers. Google your state and "homeschool support group" to find a list of groups in your area. Look one up, gather your courage and go!
- State Homeschool Conventions: These exciting events draw hundreds or thousands of area homeschoolers and feature speakers, workshops and curriculum displays.

A Website and Magazine

- *Heart of the Matter* (HeartOfTheMatterOnline.com): a Christian homeschooling site offering organized encouragement and help.
- *Homeschool Enrichment*: an evangelical magazine filled with encouraging articles and practical advice.

Legal Resources

- Homeschool Legal Advantage (HomeschoolLegalAdvantage.com) and The Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA.org) are sources of help, advice and resources about homeschooling and laws.

4. It helps to plan (at least a little)

Use this checklist to get started:

1. Meet other homeschoolers and gather ideas

- Read books, magazines and online articles
- Find and attend a local support group meeting (google your location and “homeschool support group”)
- Talk with others who are already homeschooling and find a veteran home educator willing to mentor you
- Consider attending a state homeschool convention

2. Create your homeschool vision and goals

- Write a homeschool mission statement: An explanation of your family’s big-picture goals. Answer the question “why are we homeschooling?” This will guide you as you plan and encourage you (by reminding you of the “big picture”) for years to come.
- Write 2 academic, physical, spiritual and social goals for each child.
- Decide what you ultimately hope to accomplish through homeschooling.

3. Consider how homeschooling will fit into your lifestyle

- Define the roles of each parent with respect to your homeschool
- List lifestyle priorities: what will you set aside and what will you emphasize as your family adjusts to homeschooling?

4. Choose curriculum

- Carefully consider the various educational philosophies to discern which might work best for your family
- Request catalogs and review websites of programs that interest you
- Try to find someone who has experience with the curriculum you are considering

5. Meet any state requirements

- Connect with a local homeschool support group (preferably one with some members who live in your school district)
- Contact your state homeschool organization for a knowledgeable review of your state’s requirements
- Submit any necessary paperwork

Head to www.sonlight.com/getting-started for more details and ideas.

5. There is no one “correct” way to homeschool

Homeschooling is about freedom. **You’ll find many possible approaches to teaching your children**, each with pros and cons. No one style is right for everyone. Most families find their stride with two or more teaching styles. Some veteran homeschoolers recommend finding one curriculum for at least your first year, preferably one with excellent teacher’s guides.

Traditional/Textbook Curriculum

Similar to the classroom experience you may have grown up with, this approach includes graded textbooks or workbooks to cover each subject. Curriculum typically includes teacher’s manuals, tests and record-keeping materials.

Pros	Cons
Familiar format	Potentially boring
Easy record-keeping	Learning is not as interactive and relational as it can be with other styles.

Examples of Traditional/Textbook curriculum publishers:

A Beka Books www.abeka.com

Alpha Omega www.aop.com

Bob Jones University Press www.bjupress.com

Classical Education

The classical model emphasizes classic literature over textbooks. The primary grades focus on learning facts, middle school students learn to think through arguments and high school trains students to express themselves. Students often learn Latin and Greek, read the great literature of Western civilization and study history chronologically.

Pros:	Cons:
Helps children become convincing writers, thinkers and speakers	Potentially intimidating in scope and difficulty
Systematic approach can help parents feel they’re covering everything	A focus on memorization in the early years can be boring for children

Examples of Classical Education curriculum publishers:

Classical Conversations www.classicalconversations.com

Calvert School www.calvertschool.org

Tapestry of Grace www.tapestryofgrace.com



Unit Studies

The Unit Studies approach explores topics one at a time. Entire families delve into one topic (e.g., farms or the American Civil War) as a springboard for further learning in many subjects.

Pros:	Cons:
Children of all ages (K-12) can study the same topics at the same time	Significant lesson planning, preparation and research often required from the parent; difficult to ensure you're covering everything
Can make homeschooling creative and fun while encouraging connections between subject areas	Can be hard to use the same program to meet the educational needs of young and older children as they learn together.

Examples of Unit Study curriculum publishers:

KONOS www.konos.com

My Father's Word www.mfwbooks.com

Five in a Row www.fiveinarow.com

Unschooling/Relaxed Homeschooling

Unschooling seeks to feed children's natural enthusiasm for learning. Rejecting formal instruction and curriculum, parents help children follow their interests and discover learning in everyday life.

Pros:	Cons:
Inspires children to pursue "natural learning"	May be hard to meet state standards and prepare students academically for college
Parents don't have to push children to learn things they don't want to	Can be hard to let go of society's standards for what children should be learning

Examples of resources about unschooling:

Delight-Driven Learning www.home-educate.com/unschooling

Sandra Dodd's Big Book of Unschooling, by Sandra Dodd

John Holt and Growing without Schooling www.holtgws.com

Literature-Based Learning

Literature-rich curriculum uses great books as the centerpiece of History, Literature, Bible and Geography. Engaging books (like great literature, biographies and historical fiction) make learning come alive as kids remember and connect with what they read.

Pros:	Cons:
Fosters a love of learning and allows parents to be very involved in their children's education	Involves lots of reading, which may be intimidating
Students remember what they learn through stories and gain context for understanding history and the world around them	Can be frustrating for parents who want a facts-and-figures based approach to education

Examples of Literature-Based curriculum publishers:

Sonlight Curriculum: www.sonlight.com

Five in a Row: www.fiarhq.com

Greenleaf Press: www.greenleafpress.com

For more about these curriculum approaches, browse chapter four of Carletta Sander's free e-book, *7 Secrets to Finding the Best Homeschool Curriculum*, at <http://successful-homeschooling.com/curriculum-ebook>.

6. Yes, homeschooling is legal

Homeschooling is perfectly legal in all 50 states and many countries. Some states in the U.S. have more regulations than others, so you should review your state's laws at homeschoollegaladvantage.com/homeschool-laws-by-state.

If you live outside the U.S., find laws at www.hslda.org/hs/international. For organizations supporting U.S. military families who homeschool, check out www.hslda.org/orgs/#International.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do homeschool students compare academically to traditionally-schooled peers?

- Homeschooling tends to help students thrive academically. Parents naturally tailor the education according to each child's special gifts and needs.
- Homeschooled students consistently score far above the national average on standardized testing. In one recent study, homeschool students averaged between 33-40 percentile points above the national average. Even those homeschoolers whose parents don't have college degrees averaged at the 83rd percentile for the nation. Students whose parents both have degrees averaged at the 90th percentile. Visit www.hslda.org and search for "2009 Homeschool Progress Report" for an easy-to-read, fascinating summary of this extensive study.

Will Child Protective Services (CPS) contact me if I remove my children from school?

- Most homeschoolers in the U.S. never face unwanted questioning or legal issues. Visit www.vahomeschoolers.org/law/cps.asp for encouraging answers from a member of the Virginia Child Protective Services.
- For practical ways to avoid investigation, and for clear step-by-step advice of what to do in the (unlikely) event that you are contacted by a truant officer or social service worker, visit homeschoollegaladvantage.com/legal-challenges.

What about standardized testing?

- Some states require periodic standardized testing for homeschoolers. Head to homeschoollegaladvantage.com/homeschool-laws-by-state for information about your state.
- Curious parents can use standardized testing to gauge their children's progress. For a thorough perspective on standardized testing, check out homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/articles/010499.htm.
- Visit www.hslda.org/highschool/testing.asp#standardized for descriptions and links to everything from early reading tests to Advanced Placement (AP) tests and the SAT.

What happens after high school? Can homeschoolers get into college?

- Most U.S. colleges welcome homeschool students with open arms. Many schools even have an admissions counselor dedicated to working with homeschool students.
- You should definitely plan the high school years in order to help your children get into their choice schools and earn scholarships. Find resources at www.thehomescholar.com and <http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/olderkids/Ready4College.htm>.
- Find an example of scholarships for homeschoolers at www.sonlight.com/scholarships.
- College is certainly not the only option. For resources on other opportunities after graduation, see www.hslda.org/highschool/after.asp.

What about socialization?

- Many prospective homeschool parents wonder if their children will be “properly socialized.” But consider: Instead of spending 6+ hours a day in a pressure-filled environment of same-age peers, homeschooled children spend most of their time interacting in more natural settings with children and adults of all ages. And they typically participate in many groups outside the home like sports teams, music ensembles, homeschool co-ops and church groups.
- The vast majority of homeschool students become well-adjusted adults who are productive, pleasant, contributing members of society. In *Home Educated and Now Adults*, Dr. Brian Ray finds that adults who were homeschooled are more likely than their non-homeschooled to be involved in their communities, satisfied with their work and finances, and “very happy” in life. And isn’t that what you want for your kids?

Am I qualified to teach my children?

- If you can survive the adoption process or give birth and raise a little one, you can certainly homeschool, too. You know your children best, and you care about them more than anyone else. You will find what works for them and make sure they learn. Visit www.sonlight.com/you-CAN-homeschool.html for insightful encouragement.
- There are plenty of homeschool resources to help along the way. Parents have homeschooled successfully for centuries; you can do it too!

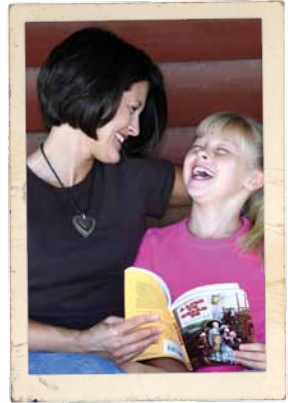
About Sonlight Curriculum



“I was nervous at first about homeschooling, but with Sonlight it all came naturally! We just followed Sonlight’s Instructor Guide and before I knew it, my son was reading everything, writing, understanding math and science, and asking questions constantly about how the world works.” —Chandra H, Aug. 2009

For over 20 years, Sonlight has equipped parents worldwide to give their children a well-rounded, literature-rich, globally-focused education from a Christian worldview. Sonlight lets you:

- Teach with confidence without stressful lesson planning.
- Be the central influence in your children’s academic and moral formation.
- Breathe easy with a one-year “Love to Learn” money-back guarantee when you buy a full curriculum package.



“Thanks Sonlight for a great first year of homeschooling! The schedule is very convenient and ‘open and go.’” —Amy P, March 2009

Request a free catalog today at www.sonlight.com/request-catalog.html.

Check out “27 Reasons Not to Buy Sonlight” to see if Sonlight may (or may not!) be right for you: www.sonlight.com/not-to-buy.html.

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Homeschooling Questions?

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